

SPECIFICATION

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METHOD AND APPARATUS TO EASILY MEASURE RETICLE BLIND POSITIONING WITH AN EXPOSURE APPARATUS

Background of the Invention

[0001] Technical Field

[0002] The present invention relates to a method of printing a wafer and an associated exposure apparatus.

[0003] Related Art

[0004] In printing a wafer with integrated circuit chips using photolithographic processes, a reticle blind of an exposure apparatus blocks exposure light from reaching portions of the wafer so that the portions of the wafer can be selectively printed. If the reticle blinds are incorrectly positioned, however, the wafer will be incorrectly printed. Thus, there is a need for a method, exposure apparatus, and printed wafer that enables a determination of whether the reticle blind has been correctly positioned within the exposure apparatus.

Brief Summary of the Invention

[0005] In first embodiments, the present invention provides a method of printing a wafer, comprising printing a design within a peripheral portion of the wafer, wherein the peripheral portion of the wafer is between an outer boundary of the active portion of the wafer and an outer boundary of the wafer.

[0006]

In second embodiments, the present invention provides an exposure apparatus for

[illegible]

[0007] a lens;

[0008] a reticle that includes a pattern; and

[0009] a reticle blind, wherein the reticle blind is adapted to block a first portion of light that is passed through the exposure apparatus, wherein a transparent portion of the reticle is adapted to transmit a remaining portion of the light, wherein the lens is adapted to focus the remaining portion of the light onto the wafer such that an image of a portion of the pattern is printed as a design within a peripheral portion of the wafer, wherein the peripheral portion of the wafer is between an outer boundary of the active portion of the wafer and an outer boundary of the wafer, and wherein the printed design is a function of where the reticle blind is positioned relative to the pattern.

[0010] In third embodiments, the present invention provides a printed wafer, comprising:
a design printed within a peripheral portion of the wafer, wherein the peripheral
portion of the wafer is between an outer boundary of the active portion of the wafer
and an outer boundary of the wafer.

[0011] The present invention advantageously provides a method, exposure apparatus, and printed wafer that enables a determination of whether a reticle blind has been correctly positioned within the exposure apparatus used for printing the wafer.

Brief Description of the Several Views of the Drawings

[0012] FIG. 1 depicts a front view of an exposure apparatus over a wafer, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0013] FIG. 2 depicts a top view of the wafer of FIG. 1, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0014] FIG. 3 depicts a top view of the reticle of FIG. 1, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0015] FIG. 4 depicts a top view of the wafer of FIG. 2 showing a distribution of device fields in an active area of the wafer, in accordance with embodiments of the present

invention.

[0016] FIG. 5 depicts the wafer of FIG. 4 showing pattern fields in the peripheral portion of the wafer, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0017] FIG. 6 depicts the wafer of FIG. 5 showing reticle blinds over the wafer, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0018] FIG. 7 depicts the wafer of FIG. 5 showing printed designs in the pattern fields, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0019] FIG. 8 depicts pattern elements of an exemplary pattern of the reticle of FIG. 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0020] FIG. 9 depicts a reticle blind over a portion of the exemplary pattern of FIG. 8, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

Detailed Description of the Invention

[0021]

FIG. 1 depicts a front view of an exposure apparatus 10 over a wafer 36, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. The exposure apparatus 10 comprises a light source 12, a reticle 14, a lens 16, and a reticle blind(s) 18. The light source 12 is any type of light source (e.g., an ultraviolet light source) that is known in the art for printing a wafer. The reticle 14 may comprise, inter alia, a sheet of glass coated with chrome on a backside 15 of the reticle 14. The lens 16 focuses light 13 from the light source 12 onto the wafer 36. The wafer 36 comprises a device field 33 and a remaining portion 35. The device field 33 of the wafer 36 comprises electrical devices such as semiconductor devices (e.g., integrated circuit chips). The remaining portion 35 of the wafer 36 includes other device fields as well as peripheral space in a peripheral portion of the wafer 36. A more complete view of the wafer 36 may be found FIG. 4 which shows device fields 41–49 and the peripheral portion 38 of the wafer 36. The device field 33 of FIG. 1 represents any one of the device fields 41–49 of FIG. 4. Although the peripheral portion 38 of FIG. 4 includes wasted space, this peripheral portion 38 is beneficially used in the present invention, as will be explained infra. In FIG. 1, the reticle blind 18 represents one or more reticle blinds. As an example, four reticle blinds may be represented by reticle blind 18, wherein the four

[0023] FIG. 3 depicts a top view of the reticle 14 of FIG. 1, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. The reticle 14 comprises an inner area 19 (bounded by surface 66) and patterns 81–92. The inner area 19 corresponds geometrically to a device field (e.g., any of the device fields 41–49 shown in FIG. 4) of the wafer 36, so that the inner area 19 transmits the light 13 (see FIG. 1) such that the lens 16 (see FIG. 1) focuses the light 13 onto said device field. In FIG. 3, the patterns 81–92 are distributed in such a manner as to transmit the light 13 (through the lens 16 of FIG. 1) into the peripheral portion 38 (see FIG. 2) of the wafer 36. Using the reticle of FIG. 3, the present invention prints a subset of the patterns 81–92 into the peripheral portion 38 of the wafer 36 as part of the process of printing the wafer 36, in order to determine whether the reticle blind(s) 18 (see FIG. 1) are correctly positioned within the exposure apparatus 10 used for printing the wafer 36.

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device fields 41–49 in the active portion 40 of the wafer 36, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. The device fields 41–49 each comprise an area in which one or more devices, such as semiconductor devices (e.g., integrated circuit chips) are to be printed by the exposure apparatus 10 of FIG. 1. Although FIG. 4 shows nine device fields, the wafer 36 generally includes N device fields, wherein N is a positive integer of at least 1.

[0025] FIG. 5 depicts the wafer 36 of FIG. 4 showing pattern fields 51–62 in the peripheral portion 38 of the wafer 36, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. The pattern fields 51–62 each comprise an area in which a corresponding subset of the patterns 81–92 on the reticle 14 (see FIG. 3) is to be printed by the exposure apparatus 10 of FIG. 1 as part of the process of printing the wafer 36. For example, the pattern field 51 of FIG. 5 may correspond to the collection 81–83 of patterns on the reticle 14 of FIG. 3.

[0026] FIG. 6 depicts the wafer 36 of FIG. 5 showing upper and lower reticle blinds 64 and 65, respectively, over the wafer 36, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. Although not shown in FIG. 6 for sake of simplicity, left and right reticle blinds are generally present. The upper and lower reticle blinds 64 and 65 move are permitted to move in (or opposite to) the direction 50, while left and right reticle blinds are permitted to move in (or opposite to) the direction 34. Definitionally, moving "downward" is moving in the direction 50, moving "upward" is moving in the direction opposite to the direction 50, moving "right" is moving in the direction 34, and moving "left" is moving in the direction that is opposite to the direction 34. The upper and lower reticle blinds 64 and 65 (as well as left and right reticle blinds if present) may collectively represent the reticle blind 18 in FIG. 1. The lower reticle blind 65 covers device fields 44–49 and each of the device fields 41–43 may be individually exposed and printed by the exposure apparatus 10 of FIG. 1, depending on the position of the left and right reticle blinds. To expose the device field 41, the right reticle blind would cover the device fields 42 and 43, and the left reticle blind would be positioned sufficiently far to the left (i.e., in the direction opposite to the direction 34) such that the device field 41 is uncovered and exposed. To expose the device field 42, the left reticle blind would cover the device field 41 and the right reticle blind would cover the device field 43 such that the device field 41 is uncovered

and exposed. To expose the device field 43, the left reticle blind would cover the device fields 41 and 42, and the right reticle blind would be positioned sufficiently far to the right (i.e., in the direction 34) such that the device field 43 is uncovered and exposed. The reticle blinds serve to protect the adjacent device fields from the light 13 (see FIG. 1) while a device field is being printed by the exposure apparatus 10 of FIG. 1. For example if the device field 42 is being exposed and printed, then: the lower reticle blind 65 covers device fields 44-46 and protects the device fields 44-46 from the light 13, the left reticle blind covers the device field 41 and protects the device field 41 from the light 13, and the right reticle blind covers the device field 43 and protects the device field 43 from the light 13. Note that in order to selectively expose the device fields 41, 42, ..., and 49, the wafer is generally moved so as to expose each device field individually.

[0027] As explained supra, while an individual device area is being printed by use of the light 13 of the exposure apparatus 10 of FIG. 1, the positioning of the reticle blinds protects the remaining portions of the active area 40 from being exposed to the light 13. Hence, it is important that the reticle blinds be correctly positioned within the exposure apparatus 10. The present invention determines whether the reticle blinds are correctly positioned, by printing the patterns 81-92 (or portions thereof) of the reticle blind 14 of FIG. 3 into the pattern fields 51-62 within the peripheral portion 38 of the wafer 36. For example, to determine whether the upper reticle blind 64 is correctly positioned, the upper reticle blind 64 is moved in the direction opposite to the direction 50 so as to partially cover the patterns 81-83 of the reticle 14 (see FIG. 3) and thus also partially cover each (i.e., one at a time) the pattern fields 51-53. Accordingly, the uncovered portions of patterns 81-83 of the reticle 14 are sequentially printed into the corresponding portion of each of pattern fields 51, 52, and 53. The portions of the patterns 81-83 that are covered by the upper reticle blind 64 may differ for each of pattern fields 51-53, since each of pattern fields 51-53 may be independently printed.

[0028] Independently printing each of pattern field 51-53 may be accomplished, inter alia, by printing the pattern field (51, 52, or 53) concurrent with the printing of a neighboring device field. For example, the pattern field 52 and the device field 42 may be concurrently printed, by positioning the lower reticle blind 65 and the left and right

FIG. 7 depicts the wafer 36 of FIG. 5 showing printed designs 21–23 in the corresponding pattern fields 51–53, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. The printed designs 21–23 do not have any electrical functionality. Each of the printed designs 21–23 correspond to portions of the patterns 81–83 of the reticle 14 of FIG. 3 wherein said portions of the patterns 81–83 are uncovered by the reticle blind 64 of FIG. 6. The device field 41 and the design 21 (within the pattern field 51) are each adjacent to a same portion 67 of the outer boundary 37 of the active portion

40 of the wafer 36. Similarly, the device fields 42, 43 and the designs 22, 23 (within the pattern fields 52, 53) are respectively adjacent to same portions of the outer boundary 37 of the active portion 40 of the wafer 36. As explained supra in conjunction with FIG. 6, the printed designs 21–23 serve as a measuring device for determining whether the reticle blind 64 is correctly positioned the exposure apparatus 10 of FIG. 1. The printed designs 21–23 may be visible to the naked eye of an observing individual. "Visible to the naked eye" comprises being visible to the naked eye unaided or visible to the naked eye with use of one or more vision aids such as, inter alia, a magnifying device (e.g., a microscope), eyeglasses, contact lenses, etc.

[0030] FIG. 8 depicts pattern elements of an exemplary pattern 95 on the reticle 14 of FIG. 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. The pattern 95 exemplifies any of the patterns 81–92 on the reticle 14 of FIG. 3. The pattern 95 comprises pattern elements 71–76 as shown. Adjacent pattern elements are separated by a spacing S. The spacing S is about equal to a design tolerance, wherein the design tolerance is a sum of a first design tolerance and a second design tolerance. The first design tolerance is based on how accurately a reticle blind can be positioned within the exposure apparatus 10 of FIG. 1. The second design tolerance is based on how sharply an edge of the reticle blind (e.g., the edge 63 of the reticle blind 64 of FIG. 6) can be focused on the wafer 36 by the lens 16 of the exposure apparatus 10 (see FIG. 1). Thus, the printed designs 21–23 in FIG. 7 measure, to within the design tolerance, where the upper reticle blind 64 is positioned relative to the patterns 81–83 on the reticle 14 of FIG. 3.

[0031] The particular pattern 95 shown in FIG. 8 is merely illustrative. The scope of the present invention includes any desired pattern with respect to any characteristics such as pattern elements, shape, lines, spacings, curvatures, densities (e.g., shades of gray), etc.

[0032] FIG. 9 depicts the upper reticle blind 64 of FIG. 6 over a portion of the exemplary pattern 95 of FIG. 8, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. FIG. 9 shows that the edge 63 of the upper reticle blind 64 is positioned at about a midpoint location within the spacing gap between pattern elements 73 and 74 of the exemplary

pattern 95. Accordingly, pattern elements 71-73 are covered by the reticle blind 64, and pattern elements 74-76 are not covered by the upper reticle blind 64. Consequently, if the pattern 95 is aligned over the pattern field 51 in the peripheral portion 38 of the wafer 36 (see FIG. 6) with the upper reticle blind 64 positioned as shown in FIG. 9, then only the pattern elements 74-76 of the pattern 95 will be printed into the pattern field 51 and the pattern elements 71-73 of the pattern 95 will not be printed into the pattern field 51. Thus, the design 21 (see FIG. 7) encompassing the pattern elements 71-76 in the pattern field 51 serves as a measuring device for determining whether the upper reticle blind 64 is correctly positioned within the exposure apparatus 10 of FIG. 1. Note that a vernier scale could be used in conjunction with a microscope to facilitate an accurate determination of the position of the upper reticle blind 64.

[0033] While embodiments of the present invention have been described herein for purposes of illustration, many modifications and changes will become apparent to those skilled in the art. For example, the present invention is not limited to printing pattern fields 51-62 in the peripheral portion 38 of the wafer 36. Any one of the pattern fields 51-62 can be printed within the active portion 40 of the wafer 36 by not printing at least one of the device fields 41-49 (see FIG. 4) to create an open space adjacent a printed device field so that at least one of the pattern fields 51-62 can be printed in the open space. Accordingly, the appended claims are intended to encompass all such modifications and changes as fall within the true spirit and scope of this invention.